

# Mangos Go Mainstream

Once seen as exotic, mangos are now the most popular fruit in the world, and part of a typical U.S. shopper's grocery list, thanks to quality shipments from Mexico.

BY SUSAN CROWELL

**T**en years ago, U.S. consumers typically viewed the mango as an exotic tropical fruit. Now, it's a fresh fruit staple.

It's no surprise consumers prefer and are buying more fresh produce in pursuit of healthier diets. Additionally, increasing ethnic diversity and growing appreciation for more tropical fruit have led to growing imports of fruits like the mango.

Want proof? In 2020, even amid the coronavirus pandemic, fresh whole mango imports in the U.S. increased by 11.4%, from 493,000 metric tons to over 549,000 metric tons, according to the National Mango Board's (NMB) 2020 annual report. Fresh whole mango arrivals saw eight weeks of over 4 million boxes per week; compared to prior years where the peak had been one or two weeks of 4 million boxes/week.

In the fresh-cut fruit category, mango was one of the three fastest-growing items in terms of overall retail sales, with an increase of 7.9%, moving up to the seventh overall position. And today, U.S. per capita consumption of mango is 3.63 pounds, up from 1.88 pounds in 2005.

Still not convinced? Experts participating in a recent NMB webinar predicted mangos will grow an additional 10% and outperform 96% of all other foods, beverages and ingredients over the next four years.

So mangos are mainstream, yes, says Carlos Capote, "but I think they will possess an exotic and mysterious flair for some time to come." Capote is president of Doral, FL-based J&C Tropicals, a multi-generation, family-owned grower, importer and marketer of more than 60 tropical fruits and vegetables, including mangos. And that mysterious flair is a lure for more and more U.S. shoppers.

## MEXICO KNOWS MANGOS

Global exports of fresh mangos (along with mangosteens and guavas) grew to an estimated 2.3 metric ton in 2020, an increase of 5.1% from the previous year, according to preliminary data in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) and Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) *Agricultural Outlook 2021-2030*.



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Mexico is the leading supplier of mangos globally, and is the top exporter of mangos to the U.S., shipping roughly 65% in 2018-2020 (the 2021 data is not yet available), with the heaviest months between March and August.

According to the Orlando, FL-headquartered National Mango Board, the Mexican mango season began January and will run until October with a projection of approximately 43.9 million boxes. Mexico's main varieties are: Tommy Atkins (40%); Ataulfo/Honey (27%); Kent (19%); Keitt (11%) and others (3%). According to the board's crop report dated Feb. 11, 2022, the 2022 Mexican season is projected to be about 3% higher, year-over-year.

There's a big advantage to importing mangos from Mexico, Capote says. "Given the proximity to the U.S., the fruit is removed from the tree and could be at a store in three to four days. And the prices tend to be 20% less expensive for the consumer."

Capote adds that Mexico is the sole provider of red mangos during the U.S. summer from June through August.

Mangos are the No. 1 most consumed fruit in the world, says Tom Argyros, sales manager for RCF Produce Distributors, headquartered in Rio Rico, AZ, "and the fruit from Mexico

will always have better eating experience, no matter what the variety."

RCF Produce Distributors is part of a vertically integrated, family-owned, international distributing company that specializes in the importation of fruits and vegetables from Mexico to the U.S., particularly mangos. And the company's growth mirrors the increase in per capita mango consumption — over the last decade, it has seen between a 10% and 15% increase per year, and has gone from importing 2.5 million boxes of mangos 10 years ago, to 5 million boxes today, Argyros says.

"Especially since the pandemic, retailers realize the best game in town are the mangos from Mexico, because of the challenges at the ports of entry for the offshore mangos," he adds.

"In Mexico, we pack a mango today in Oaxaca or Chiapas, and we'll have that fruit in McAllen (TX) in two days, and we can have it in Los Angeles or New York in another three or four days, so a fruit from Mexico has less than 10 days from the tree to the table," says Argyros.

"And when we move to the production farther north in Mexico, the quicker it is from the tree to the table," he adds. "When we get to Sinaloa, it's overnight to Nogales and

overnight to Los Angeles. So that fruit that they're getting from Los Angeles might only be four or five days old when it's hitting the final destination."

That proximity also means the market can be better anticipated, says Daniel Ibarra, president of the Nogales, AZ-based Splendid by Porvenir LLC, an importer and distributor. And, he adds, "Mexico has many seasons, which makes great mangos that ripen in different seasonalities" and extends their availability.

The Mexican mango is a harbinger of spring and summer, Ibarra says. "It's the best season, just when the country starts to warm up for spring, and people consider it a tropic fruit, so demand increases."

### OPPORTUNITY TO GROW SALES

Although demand has been booming, there's still plenty of room to grow, says Amanda Horney, business development manager at London Fruit, a South Texas, family-owned business that has been importing and distributing Mexican mangos for 40 years.

"The demand on the coasts is great," she says of the East and West coasts of the U.S., "and hopefully we'll see more demand coming out of the Midwest."

"That's where there's opportunity to grow. People just don't know enough about it. It's not an item that's promoted enough in that area and I think it could be."

Horney says retailers seem to be moving toward 5-down, display-ready boxes, as well as bagged mangos.

"London Fruit has been an importer of mangos for more than 40 years, so we know mangos. We can custom pack bags, 5-down and the 4-kilo boxes," says Horney.

Argyros agrees that retailers are switching to the 5-down boxes, which hold between 20 and 22 pounds net weight, depending on the variety. The boxes cut down on labor for all steps in the supply chain, palletize easier and ride better, maintaining fruit quality.

Horney also says there seems to be growing demand for yellow mango, which is the Ataulfo/Honey variety. "It's actually my



Giving mangos more visibility and consistent positioning is key to increasing sales.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CIRILLI BROTHERS

favorite piece of fruit. It doesn't have the fibers that the round mangos have, and it's a lot sweeter," she explains, adding that it's geared to a more ethnic market.

Horney warns that the crop out of Mexico might be a little shorter this year due to weather. "This season we will see a slow start out of Mexico, so book ahead. Weather permitting, promotable volumes should be available by mid-March. There should be good size distribution, at least in the areas we're pulling from," she says.

### MANGOS SELL OTHER PRODUCE

Make the most of Mexican mangos by emphasizing how well they play with others — you can merchandise a mango with just about anything in the produce category and you'll increase sales of more than just mangos.

"We know through internal and external insights, there is considerable cross shopping with mangos and avocados, citrus and stone fruit, roughly 30% cross-shopping," says Tricia Bramley, National Mango Board director of marketing. "We educate and encourage our retail clients to create merch sets that place mangos adjacent to these high traffic fruit."

Bramley adds the NMB's strategic goal is "to get mangos out of the exotics and position them as a mainstream fruit. We talk to our retailer partners about adjusting their merchandising sets to give mangos a more visible and consistent position in the produce department. The consumers cannot purchase a mango if they cannot find them."

To Argyros, "no matter where retailers put mangos, it's going to increase the sales of whatever item it's put next to." And the same goes to extra mango merchandising or advertising.

"If you put a Gala apple on ad, or a Fuji apple on ad, they're going to cannibalize the other varieties, and the same with the stone fruit, and same with grapes," he explains. "But mangos? It's only going to drive the sales up of those other items. Because there's no real mango recipe where it's only one ingredient — you're going to need other things. I think you could probably put mangos next to celery and they'll probably drive the celery."

Fresh cut displays are also a way to feature mangos in a different way to the consumers, Bramley adds. "Retailers can utilize refrigerated end caps to feature fresh cut, and some

## ■ MANGO EXPECTATIONS AT RETAIL RECEIVING POINT

The National Mango Board offers detailed reference sheets on mango maturity, ripeness and defects on its website, <https://www.mango.org>, under the "Professionals" tab. It also offers guides to mango maturity in both English and Spanish.

- Mangos are harvested when mature,

but not ripe. A mature mango will ripen normally with increasing soluble solids content (degrees Brix) and decreasing firmness to become ready to eat.

- At receiving, you can expect the mangos to be mature, but not necessarily ripe.
- Maturity can be judged by a combi-

nation of factors, including internal color, firmness, degrees Brix and fruit shape.

- Red skin is not an indicator of maturity, quality or ripeness and should not be used to evaluate mangos at receiving.
- It is very typical to find mangos of differing maturity and ripeness in the same load and in the same box.

Source: National Mango Board



stores even have mobile refrigerated displays that can be moved around within the stores or even at the check out.”

Like avocados and bananas, mango sales have been boosted with ripening, or pre-conditioning, steps, but it’s important that retailers work with a wholesale partner that understands the process and the variations among mango varieties. And, again like avocados and bananas, mango sales benefit from having ripe, ready-to eat fruit available, as well as mangos shoppers can ripen at home.

## **SUPERFRUIT TO THE RESCUE**

Let’s face it: We love mangos because they’re sweet and refreshing. But that sweet snack is also good for us, says Meredith McGrath RD, LDN, a corporate dietitian with Redner’s Markets, a regional chain

with grocery and convenience stores located throughout eastern Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware.

“They are readily available year-round, extremely versatile for meals and snacks, and contain over 20 different vitamins and minerals,” McGrath says. “I always recommend that our guests keep them on hand to add to a fruit smoothie, whip up a mango salsa, or get creative by adding into your favorite side dishes.”

And, she adds, mangos are “an excellent way to get vitamin C into your diet and keep your immune system strong.”

With a high water content (up to 83%), the mango can satisfy nutrient recommendations and keep you hydrated.

Mangos are also a super versatile super-fruit, says NMB’s Bramley. “The versatility

of mango is propelling uses across all eating occasions. It’s an easy fruit to add to meals and snacks for a burst of flavor, especially on plant forward menus.”

“With the ever-expanding palates of Gen Z, our most diverse generation yet, mangos are poised to continue to grow as consumers embrace a variety of flavors and cuisines where mangos are an authentic ingredient. For example, the mangonada, a Mexican drink or snack, had soared in popularity in recent years.”

“Consumers are demanding fresh, flavorful, and functional elements to be incorporated in their diets, and mango gives consumers what they crave,” she adds.

Splendid by Porvenir’s Ibarra says customers are starting to increase their demand for organic fruit, and this market is increasing for mangos, as well. **pb**